DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 299 457 CE 051 131

AUTHOR	Naylor, Michele
TITLE	Vocational Education and the Work Ethic in a Changing Workplace. ERIC Digest No. 78.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Columbus, Ohio.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	88
CONTRACT	RI88062005
NOTE	4p.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Career Education; *Critical Thinking; Decision Making; Employer Employee Relationship; *Ethical Instruction; Ethics; Problem Solving; *Program Content; *School Role; Secondary Education; Values Education; *Vocational Education; *Work Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests; *Work Ethic

ABSTRACT

Studies have shown that employers have traditionally agreed on the behaviors and attitudes they expect from employees and on the security and benefits that they are willing to provide in return. Various factors, including rapid technological advancement and increased foreign competition, have changed this. Today's workers generally have less job security than their predecessors. Furthermore, different employers have begun requiring different attitudes and behaviors from their employees. These changes have in turn made it necessary for vocational and career educators to revise their approach to preparing students to enter and function in the world of work. This revised approach, which has come to be known as vocational ethics, is intended to (1) provide students with a framework for recognizing and resolving internal and external ethical conflicts and (2) give students the opportunity to develop an enabling work ethic. Vocational ethics instruction is centered around two main topics: ethical reasoning skills and mediation skills (assertiveness, emphatic listening, principled negotiation, and risk taking). (MN)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED299457

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND THE WORK ETHIC IN A CHANGING WORKPLACE

ERIC DIGEST NO. 78

Michele Naylor

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

1988

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CE051131

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ERIC DIGEST No. 78

Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND THE WORK ETHIC IN A CHANGING WORKPLACE

Studies conducted in the 1970s (Maywood 1982) provide evidence that employers have traditionally agreed on the behaviors and attitudes they expect from employees and the security and benefits that they are willing to provide in return. According to Maywood, employers' rankings of the attributes most desired in employees consistently confirm that the most desirable employee is one who demonstrates the traditionally valued characteristics of reliability, dependability, pride of craftsmanship, and willingness to learn and who derives personal gratification from a job well done. Vocational education has traditionally responded to this need through instruction on appropriate work behaviors and attitudes.

This ***ERIC Digest*** examines recent changes in the workplace and related changes in employers' attitudes and needs that have made it necessary to reassess the traditional curriculum used to teach appropriate work attitudes and behaviors. The ***Digest*** outlines an approach to preparing students for future employment by equipping them with the higher-order thinking and negotiating skills that have been collectively termed *vocational ethics*.

The Changing Workplace

The transition from an economy based on local agriculture and manufacturing markets to a global, information-based economy has been accompanied by an increasing orientation toward jobs based on mental rather than physical activity. The following changes have especially profound implications for the workplace:

- In an attempt to meet increasing foreign competition by improving product quality and productivity, management has begun to encourage and, in many cases, require greater worker participation in decisions affecting both the quality of the work environment and the production process. According to Wirth (Miller and Coady 1984), this trend has blurred the traditionally sharp demarcation between labor and management.
- The accelerating pace of technological advancement has made it much less likely that workers will hold the same job throughout their working lives, and the increasing economic pressures brought to bear by a global economy have made it far less likely that workers will begin and end their working lives at the same organization (Miller and Coady 1984).
- As organizations adopt different strategies to increase their productivity and improve the quality of their product or service, they adopt the new collaboration-based model of structuring the workplace to different degrees.

Implications for Vocational and Career Education

The two emerging trends—the blurring of the traditional sharp demarcations between the rights and responsibilities of labor and management and rapid technological and economic change—have resulted in reduced job security. Jennings (Miller and Coady 1984) states that "sometimes the economy, the high-tech and service sector-oriented kind of economy of the future, may be healthy as a whole precisely by virtue of an extremely and rapidly fluctuating job market" (p. 17). As job security decreases and as job restructuring and career change become more widespread, vocational educators charged with preparing students to enter and function in the world of work must bear the additional responsibility of equipping students with the thinking and negotiating skills necessary to manage their own career development.

A second result of the changes in the workplace is that different employers have begun requiring and expecting different attitudes and behaviors from their employees. According to Miller and Coady (1986), as early as 1982, U.S. companies were beginning to differ with regard to the value themes they emphasize—hence their conclusion that students being prepared for the postindustrial workplace must be made aware that (1) no one set of values may be assumed to be held in equal value by all organizations at all times and that (2) employers may not be "the single source of guiding work values in all work contexts" (Miller and Coady 1986, p. 5).

Definitions of Terms

According to Miller and Coady (1986), the term *work ethic* refers to the "beliefs, values, and principles that guide the way individuals interpret and act upon their job rights and responsibilities within the work context at any given time" (p. 5). In his discussion of changing attitudes toward work, Maywood (1982) defines the *Protestant work ethic* as the view that humans have a moral duty to work diligently, regardless of their station in life, and that by doing so they can reap societal regard and thepersonal reward of knowing that a job has been well done.

Miller and Coady (1986) point out that, as innovation, flexibility, and collaborative efforts are accepted on an increasingly wider scale, the way in which many of these values (for example, punctuality) are viewed will differ dramatically from employer to employer. Because of this, vocational educators and career counselors will have to focus less on teaching a set of universally accepted skills and values (such as those associated with the Protestant work ethic) and more on equipping students with the higher-order decision-making and problem-solving skills that they will need to cope with increased individual responsibility for shaping their work environments. (In many respects, this shift away from specifics to higher-order and more generalizable skills parallels the movement away from job-specific to transferable skills that is occurring in many vocational programs.)

This revised approach to preparing students to enter and function in the world of work has come to be known as *vocational ethics*. The use of the word *ethics* here should not be interpreted in its general sense of a theory or system of moral values. The definition of vocational ethics offered by Jennings (Miller and Coady 1984)—"the rights of a worker as well as the rights that management demands of a worker and what a worker demands reciprocally" (p. 67)—makes it clear that *ethics* in this context has a narrower scope that is perhaps closer in meaning to "professional ethics."

Miller and Coady (1986) define the purpose of vocational ethics as being to (1) "provide students with a framework for recognizing and resolving ethical conflicts within themselves, with others, and with their environment in such a way as to promote individual job satisfaction and continuous and productive employment"and (2) give students the "opportunity to develop an enabling work ethic" (p. 5).

This viewpoint is reinforced by Copa et al. (1985). One of the purposes they identify for vocational education is to "socialize individuals to manage the work aspects of their lives in a way that is to their benefit and that of the larger community" (p. 7-7). Dimensions of this role include the relation of work to community, relation of self to work, and relation of work to other facets of an individual's life.

Overt Instruction versus the Hidden Curriculum

Miller and Coady outline strategies and materials for use in teaching vocational ethics and helping students develop more individual responsibility through (1) overt instruction and (2) indirect instruction (also referred to as the "hidden curriculum"). Overt vocational ethics instruction is centered around two main topics: ethical reasoning skills (also termed *values assessment criteria*) and mediation skills.

Values Assessment Criteria

Six values assessment criteria provide students with the decision-making tools needed to make a comprehensive evaluation of options available when they are confronted with an ethical dilemma: reciprocity, consistency, coherence, comprehensiveness, adequacy, and duration. The criteria help students consider the direct and indirect consequences of a decision in a manner that is both comprehensive and nonmoralizing (Miller and Coady 1986).

Mediation Skills

The following mediation skills are intended to enable students to implement their decisions successfully.

Assertiveness. The ability to stand up for one's rights without infringing upon those of others by using such techniques as "I-language"; assertive body language; sensitivity to such factors as location, timing, relationships, and frequency when making assertive statements; giving and appropriately receiving positive and negative feedback; conversation skills such as open-ended questions, self-disclosing statements, and process observation.

Emphatic listening. The ability to give verbal feedback demonstrating an understanding of the emotional and intellectual content of others' communications, recognize messages conveyed through facial expressions and body language, recognize when conflicting messages are being conveyed, respond to others with compatible verbal and body language so as to promote interpersonal understanding, empathize with the personal experiences expressed by others, and to make statements identifying the feelings and attitudes being expressed by others.

Principled negotiation. The ability to respond to issues rather than the personalities of those involved in negotiations, identify the underlying interests of those involved in the negotiation process, determine the extent to which the stated positions and underlying interests of individuals involved in the negotiation process are compatible, generate a variety of possible solutions to a given problem before entering into the negotiation process, and develop and use objective and fair standards to obtain a negotiated statement.

Risk taking. The ability to recognize one's own value hierarchy; estimate one's chances of success or failure relative to a number of courses of action involving risk; understand the influence of deprivation and oversufficiency in relation to one's personal values; understand and predict the consequences of success and failure in a given decision-making process; understand the influence of one's attributions of the causes of one's past failures and successes on future risk-taking behaviors; understand expected outcomes of win-win, win-lose, and lose-lose situations; and understand the influence of group members on one another in making group decisions involving risk (Miller and Coady 1986).

The Hidden Curriculum

Miller and Coady emphasize that the hidden curriculum, that is, the relationship between the authority figure (teacher) and those charged with carrying out tasks (students), is equally, if not more, important in helping students develop more individual responsibility and the skills required to develop an enabling work ethic. They point out the pitfalls of such policies as enforcing mandatory attendance, not enforcing deadlines, emphasizing rote learning, measuring material retained versus concepts mastered, focusing exclusively on "final products" in grading, developing unmeaningful rewards and punishments, keeping interpersonal contact to a minimum, and settling conflicts in private. Thus, structuring vocational classrooms in accordance with a more democratic, collaborative model provides yet another opportunity for vocational educators to help their students develop a greater appreciation of the consequences of their attitudes and behaviors and thus assume more individual responsibility for them.

REFERENCES

Copa, G., Daines, J., Ernst, L., Knight, J., Leske, G., Persico, J., Plihal, J., and Scholl, S. ***Purpose of Vocational Education in the Secondary School.*** St. Paul: University of Minnesota, 1985. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 276 850).

Maywood, A. G. "Vocational Education and the Work Ethic." ***Canadian Vocational Journal*** 18, no. 3 (November 1982): 7-12. (ERIC No. EJ 270 776).

Miller, P. F., and Coady, W. T., eds. ***Report on the Proceedings of the Conference on the Future of the World of Work, Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri, October 12, 1984.*** Carbondale: Office of Research, Development, and Administration, Southern Illinois University, 1984. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 285 984).

Miller, P. F., and Coady, W. T. ***Vocational Ethics: Toward the Development of an Enabling Work Ethic.*** Springfield: Illinois Department of Adult, Vocational, and Technical Education, 1986. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 288 062).

This ***ERIC Digest*** was developed in 1988 by Michele Naylor, ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under Contract No. RI88062005. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the position or policies of the OERI or the Department of Education.

ERIC is sponsored by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR RESEARCH IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
1960 KENNY ROAD · COLUMBUS OHIO 43210